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Maori Language and the Pakeha Education System

- A Historical Outline

(Mark I version, 1982)

This is based on Pakeha sources, that is, government documents and historical articles by Pakeha authors.

1816 on The first mission school was set up by the Church Missionary Society (Anglican) in the Bay of Islands in 1816. The Wesleyans followed in 1822, and the Roman Catholics in 1838. The peak period of the mission schools was in the 1830's and 1840's.

From the beginning, Pakeha educators had assimilationist goals. The missionaries sought to convert the Maoris to Christianity, and along with this to initiate them 'in the customs and manners of civilised life' (Samuel Marsden, about 1820, quoted in B&B, p.9). To this end they learnt the Maori language, taught in Maori, and translated the Bible into Maori. (source: B&B chapter 2).

1830's on During the 1830's there was a rapid spread of literacy among Maoris. Those who learnt to read and write (in Maori) at the mission schools passed their knowledge onto others, and Maoris set up their own schools for the purpose (B&B,p.25), so that by the early 1840's about 'half of the adult population could read or write a little in their own language' (B&B,p.28), and 'it seems possible, indeed likely, that by the middle of the nineteenth century a higher proportion of the Maori than of the settlers were literate in their own language' (Biggs,p.73).

1839 Lord Normanby, British Secretary of State for War and Colonies, wrote in his instructions to Captain William Hobson, 15 August 1839:

> 'The establishment of schools for the education of the aborigines in the elements of literature will be another object of your solicitude; and until they can be brought within the pale of civilised life, and trained to the adoption of its habits, they must be carefully defended in the observance of their own customs, so far as these are compatible with the universal maxims of humanity and and morals.' (McNab, vol 1, p.735).

1844 Native Trust Ordinance 1844. While FitzRoy was Governor, the N.Z. Legislative Council passed 'An Ordinance for appointing a Board of Trustees for the Management of Property to be set apart for the Education and Advancement of the Native Race'. The preamble was a clear statement of the assimilationist view:

> 'Whereas the Native people of New Zealand are by natural endowment apt for the acquirement of the arts and habits of civilized life, and are capable of great moral and social advancement: And whereas large numbers of the said people are already desirous of being instructed in the English language and in English arts and usages: And whereas great disasters have fallen upon uncivilized nations on being brought into contact with Colonists from the nations of Europe, and in undertaking the colonization of New Zealand Her Majesty's Government have recognized the duty of endeavouring by all practicable means to avert the like disasters from the Native people of these Islands, which object may best be attained by assimilating as speedily as possible the habits and usages of the Native to those of the European population' etc.

However, section 28 stated that the Ordinance would not come into effect until gazetted: the next Governor, Grey, failed to gazette it. (B&B,p.40).

1847 Education Ordinance 1847. This was passed by the N.Z. Legislative Council (and came into force) under Grey's governorship, to provide government support for mission schools, on condition that

> 'In every school to be established or supported by public funds under the provisions of this Ordinance, religious education, industrial training, and instruction in the English language shall form a necessary part of the system to be pursued therein' (section 3.).

This marked the beginning of a system, which lasted until 1867, in which English was taught to Maoris as a foreign language, while the bulk of education was still conducted in Maori.

> 'The Maori and their teachers found out what everyone in such a situation finds out, that learning a foreign language is a long and difficult process, and particularly difficult in the absence of constant opportunity to hear the second language being spoken. In contrast to the ease with which the Maori had become literate in their own language, the teaching of English, spoken or written, met with little success.' (Biggs, p.74).

This system was soon under attack.

1853 Auckland School Inspectors reported that it was 'desirable that the English language should be made the vehicle of instruction exclusively in cases where it is fully understood, and, as far as can usefully be done, in all cases'. (quoted in Biggs, p.74).

1858 Native Schools Act 1858. This Act provided for yearly government grants, for 7 years, to Anglican, Wesleyan, and Roman Catholic schools, on the basis of a yearly rate per scholar enrolled. Section 9 reads:

> 'Instruction in the English language and in the ordinary subjects of primary English education, and Industrial training, shall form a necessary part of the system to be pursued in every school to be aided under this Act.'

1862 Henry Taylor, Auckland Inspector of Native Schools, in a report to Parliament noted 'some impediments to progress' in 'carrying on the work of civilization among the aboriginal Native race, through the medium of schools':

> 'The Native language itself is also another obstacle in the way of civilization, so long as it exists there is a barrier to the free and unrestrained intercourse which ought to exist between the two races, it shuts out the less civilized portion of the population from the benefits which intercourse with the more enlightened would confer. The School-room alone has power to break down this wall of partition between the two races. Too much attention cannot be devoted to this branch of Maori education. The Natives themselves are most anxious on this point. At present in common with many others who have inspected Native Schools, I have to pronounce the teaching of English as almost a decided failure.' (AJHR,E-4,1862,p.35-6).

1867 Native Schools Act 1867. This Act marked the beginning of the policy of using English as the sole medium of instruction in schools for Maoris. Section 21 reads:

> 'No school shall receive any grant unless it is shown to the satisfaction of the Colonial Secretary by the report of the inspector or otherwise as the Colonial Secretary shall think fit that the English language and the ordinary subjects of primary English education are taught by a competent teacher and that the instruction is carried on in the English language as far as practicable Provided always that it shall be lawful for the Colonial Secretary to contribute to the maintenance or salaries of such Native teachers as shall conduct Native Schools in remote districts when it may be found impossible to provide English teachers.'

The Act provided for the setting up of schools in Maori villages where 'any considerable number of the male adult native inhabitants' requested it (section 5), and for government support on the condition that the Maori community provided at least an acre of land, half the cost of the buildings (school-room and teacher's residence) and 25% of the teacher's salary (sections 8 and 9). The idea, which had been put forward by several Inspectors of Schools in the preceding years, was that Maori communities would be more likely to support schools which they had asked for and to which they had committed resources. (Barrington, p.2). Native Schools subsidised under the Act were administered by the Native Affairs Department.

In moving the second reading of the Bill in the House of Representatives, J. C. Richmond stated that:

> 'for a people in the position of the Maori race it was a first condition of their progress to put them in the way of learning the language of the inhabitants and Government of the Colony. The Bill proceeded on the principle of subsidizing results. Payment was to be made upon the condition of certain progress being made. Up to the present time little had been done in this way. Money had been spent on Maori schools, but little had been done in teaching the Maoris the English language.'

and in seconding the motion, J. O'Neill

> 'thought it was a step in the right direction. Money had been spent on the Natives in teaching them their own native language instead of teaching them English.'

A little later in the debate, H. Carleton, a former Inspector of Native Schools,

> 'meant to say that things had now come to that pass that it was necessary either to exterminate the Natives or to civilize them. They could not go on fighting them any longer. Honorable members were now no doubt well up in the financial question, and all would, he was sure, agree that another serious war would not only cripple the Colony, but would actually break its back. The idea of exterminating the Natives could not for a moment be dreamed of in that House, and there was, therefore, no alternative but to vote for the measure then before the House. ...
> They could never civilize them through the medium of a language that was imperfect as a medium of thought. If they attempted it, failure was inevitable; and civilization could only be eventually carried out by means of a perfect language.'

(N.Z. Parliamentary Debates, 1867, p.862-3).

1871 Native Schools Amendment Act 1871. This dispensed with the requirement that Maori communities had to provide money for buildings and salaries, in order to make it easier to establish 'Native' schools. Maori communities still had to provide the land for the schools, and the Governor could now require them to give land to school trusts as endowments, in lieu of money for buildings and salaries (section 5).

1876-7 There was some Maori support for the Native schools and the English-only policy. A petition to Parliament of 337 Maoris asked that 'there should not be a word of Maori allowed to be spoken in the school' (B&B, p.116). Two other petitions called for schools to be set up throughout the country (Barrington, p.3). These petitioners clearly saw knowledge of English as a means of access to a share of power.

1870's -c.1920 However, movements which sought to retain Maori autonomy opposed the Native schools completely. The King movement ran its own schools, conducted entirely in Maori, and had its own Minister of Education (Auckland Evening Star, 1/2/1878, quoted in B&B, p.120). King Tawhiao (about 1880) told the Government to 'cease surveying, cease selling, cease erecting schools' (B&B,p.125). Te Kooti warned Maoris against the spiritual infection of the schools (1881 reference in Barrington, p.6). In the 1900's and 1910's, Rua Kenana's followers kept their children away from the schools (B&B,p.140). It was about 1920 before 'Native' schools were established and regularly attended in all Maori districts.

1879 The Education Department was established (under the Education Act 1877) and took over the running of the Native schools.

1880 The Native Schools Code 1880 was a detailed set of 'Rules and Regulations' for the conduct of Native schools. It included a syllabus which was completely British and which was similar to that for Board (Pakeha) primary schools. Rule II.3 stated:

> 'It is not necessary that teachers should, at the time of their appointment, be acquainted with the Maori tongue. In all cases English is to be used by the teacher when he is instructing the senior classes. In the junior classes the Maori language may be used for the purpose of making the children acquainted with the meanings of English words and sentences. The aim of the teacher, however, should be to dispense with the use of Maori as soon as possible.'

Teachers in Native schools were to be graded on the basis of examinations (rule IX). To be eligible for the top two gradings, teachers had to pass 'N.Z. History' which included 'Maori traditions; indigenous productions and their uses; Maori customs'. There was an examination in Maori language, but it was not essential to pass, or even to sit it. Referring to these policies allowing a limited role for Maori language, Ramsay writes that Pope, the Inspector of Native Schools,

> 'worked very hard to translate these policies into practice [but] there is considerable doubt as to whether they were ever fully implemented. Teachers with a knowledge of the Maori language and culture were in short supply, and training for such programmes was non-existent. Where endeavours were made it is doubtful if the true meaning of Maori culture was appreciated by the teachers. The combination of these difficulties led to a rejection of Pope's

emphases by many of his teachers, and to continuation of the emphasis on the teaching of English language, and to attempts to rapidly assimilate the Maori to European norms.' (Ramsay, p.40).

1888 But Pope's concessions to Maori language and culture were minimal anyway. His goal remained complete assimilation of the Maori; in his annual report in 1888, he wrote:

> 'The work of teaching the Maoris to speak, write, and understand English is in importance second only to that of making them acquainted with European customs and ways of thinking, and so fitting them for becoming orderly and law-abiding citizens. Indeed, it might be maintained that the first-named of these operations is the more important, seeing that the knowledge of English ways can hardly be obtained by Natives unacquainted with the language. To teach the Natives English is therefore the raison d'etre of Native schools. If they do this work well their existence is justified; if not, there can be little advantage in maintaining a separate order of schools for this purpose. The task is one of extreme difficulty for many reasons; the Maori language is so fundamentally different from the English that, to say nothing of hereditary aptitudes, the Maori, from the time that he begins to speak and think has his vocal organs and thinking faculties moulded in such a way that he could hardly be rendered more unfitted for speaking English and using it as an instrument of thoughtif his vernacular had been specially devised for that very purpose. ...
> Masters of Native schools are constantly hampered by the difficulty caused by their pupils' training in the use of Maori being continued along with the training in English that they are receiving from their teachers.'
> (AJHR, 1888, E-2, p.9).

1906 By 1906 it is clear that the use of Maori was completely excluded at many schools, both 'Native' schools and Education Board schools. (Almost as many Maori pupils were now attending Board schools as were going to 'Native' schools.) Bird, the Inspector of Native Schools at this time, endorsed this practice in his annual report:

> 'I should like to impress upon both teachers and Committees the necessity for encouraging the children to talk English on the playground, and to see that this is done as much as possible. There are many schools in which this habit is regularly practised, and it is very encouraging to hear the young Maori children calling to one another in English as they chase each other about the playground.
> I may inform teachers that it has been alleged that an important distinction exists in this very respect between the Maori children attending a Board school and those attending one of our own Native schools - namely, that the former speak English in the playground, while the latter speak Maori. I hope that teachers will do their best to give this statement a practical denial, and to take every care to impress upon the children the necessity of practising outside school the lessons they learn within it.'
> (AJHR, E-2, 1906, p.11-12).

In the experience of several generations of Maori students, this 'encouragement' was interpreted as a complete ban, enforced by corporal punishment, on the speaking of Maori at school, even in the playground. In Biggs' words, the 'Education Department declared total war on the Maori language' (Biggs, p.74).

(1970's) Even in the early 1970's, during the survey by the N.Z. Council for Educational Research of Maori usage, 'in many rural areas, half or more of the adult informants interviewed ... reported having been punished at school for speaking Maori' (Benton, p.46).

(1906) In the same 1906 report, in reference to examinations for Te Makarini scholarships for study at Te Aute College, Bird wrote:

> 'I would again point out the difficulties with which boys have to contend in regard to what is defined in the regulations as "English." The three South Island candidates, though all of them Maori by birth, did not know the Maori language; and, from the point of view of Maori school education, this is a consummation devoutly to be wished. But it was a severe handicap to them, as their marks showed, when they found that they were called upon to translate Maori, for this meant that the candidates were asked to take a step backwards in their education.' (p.9).

1909 Partly as a result of 'Native' schools being transferred one by one to Education Board control, once they were considered to have "reached sufficient standard", from 1909 there were always more Maori children in Board schools than in 'Native' (later 'Maori') schools. (B&B, p.138).

1909 Maori was made an optional subject for Maori boys attending Maori denominational boarding schools (Benton, p.25), which were in practice the only form of secondary education available to Maoris at this time (Ramsay, p.41).

1913 90% of Maori children attending 'Native' schools were estimated to speak only Maori at home (Biggs, p.75).

1925-9 During this period, Maori became an examinable subject for BA and for University Entrance, but it was not actually taught. (Biggs, p.75; Benton, p.25-6).

1931 Maori became a compulsory subject in Maori denominational boarding schools (Biggs, p.75; Benton, p.25).

1930's For the first time, elements of Maori culture were introduced into the curriculum of the Maori schools to 'arouse racial pride' (Barrington, p.7), but the Maori language itself was not taught. D. G. Ball, the Inspector of Maori Schools at this time, said in an interview in 1973:

> "I felt that we should make these schools Maori schools as far as we could. If I only knew then what I know now, I don't think we'd have had any problems, but I didn't know enough, and I grasped the superficial things. I said 'Let the kids talk Maori, let's have Maori legends, let's have Maori songs, haka, and dance, let's have Maori crafts in the school, but at the same time, of course, we've got to teach them English because they've got to live in this new world'. ... But they were still English schools, with an English curriculum and with English teachers teaching the way they'd been taught." (Ball, p.11).

Asked about the teaching of Maori language, he said:

> 'in my time there was very little desire for it from the Maoris - that the Maori language should be taught in school. Ngata himself said that Maori children had got to learn English. So there was not a great deal of pressure there.

...Secondly, as far as I was concerned, I didn't speak Maori. Let's admit it - that probably had some influence; how much I don't know. The great majority of the teachers - ninety-nine percent - didn't speak Maori. The training colleges were not interested in the Maori in those days at all. I don't think they knew the Maoris existed.' (p.11-12).

?1934 Maori language was included as a subject for the new School Certificate examination according to B&B (p.208), but this did not happen until 1945 according to Biggs (p.75).

1936-9 As regards Ngata's attitude, in a speech to the 1936 Conference on Maori Education, Health and Welfare, he stated "that if he were allowed to devise a curriculum for the schools, he would make 'English first, second, third, fourth and all the rest of the subjects fifth' ... But, within three years, Ngata had changed his mind about the Maori language. Speaking to the important conference of young Maori leaders at Auckland in 1939, he said that he had formerly opposed the teaching of Maori in Native schools because he had believed there was not sufficient time for pupils to learn both Maori and English. Now he believed 'nothing was worse than for one to be with Maori features but without his own language'" (B&B, p.206-7).

1941 The first Maori District High School was established. In these schools, 'the Maori language was usually included in the courses which were available' (B&B, p.234-5).

1951, 1958 'it was not until Dr Bruce G. Biggs was appointed Lecturer in Maori Studies at the University of Auckland in 1951 that the language was actually taught by a permanent member of the faculty at any constituent college of the University of New Zealand, and Dr Biggs himself had to overcome entrenched opposition from many of his colleagues before Maori was recognized in 1958 as a language subject for the purpose of satisfying the University of Auckland's requirements for graduation.' (Benton, p.26).

1953-8 Hoani Waititi estimated that of Maoris entering a number of secondary schools in the Auckland area during this period, 26% could speak Maori and 62% could understand it (Biggs, p.75).

1968 As a final comment, a quote from Biggs (1968):
'The change in the attitude of the educators should be misunderstood. There is no real indication of any appreciation of the psychological and educational significance of the mother tongue to a child. The willingness to admit Maori into the curriculum of certain schools at certain levels suggests to the writer only that the educators felt that their battle was won, that Maori was in full retreat, and that they could safely exercise the magnanimity of the victor. It is significant that Maori has never been admitted as a language at primary schools, where it was, and certain areas is, most necessary.' (Biggs, p.76).

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